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LALA HARDAYAL

A Biographical Note

(P.C. Joshi)

Lala Hardayal belong to the early valiant band of Indian revolutionaries. He played a leading role among the Indian revolutionary exiles abroad but ultimately fell out with the national movement itself. His heroic life and tragic end are typical of the worth as well as the limitations of the revolutionary pioneers.

Born in the 1880s, Lala Hardayal awoke to national consciousness in the first decade of the present century. What was happening in India in which Hardayal was born and grew up? India had begun to regain a new awareness after the ruthless suppression of the 1857 national uprising. The very first revolutionary groups that emerged in India found from experience that ruthless repressive measures by the British had to be taken for granted. Tilak's incarceration during 1897 clearly indicated that the extremist national leaders had to take denial of democratic liberties as part of the situation to be faced.

Emigration to places where democratic liberties existed, became the inevitable course to follow. During the first decade of the twentieth century, Indian revolutionary exiles had built up their working centres in London, Paris, Geneva and Berlin.

It was against this background that Lala Hardayal came to the Indian political scene.

Lala Hardayal was born in Delhi on October 14, 1884 in a Kayastha family. He was educated in Delhi and Lahore and had "a brilliant academic career."[1] Standing first in the M.A. examination (Lahore) he easily won a Government of India scholarship to St. John's College, Oxford in 1905.

In England, he came in touch with the India House, the centre for all Indian nationalist extremists which was recently established by Shyamaji Krishna Varma who was spreading revolutionary propaganda among the students and editing the *Indian Sociologist*. In the



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SWADESHABHIMANI RAMAKRISHNA PILLAI

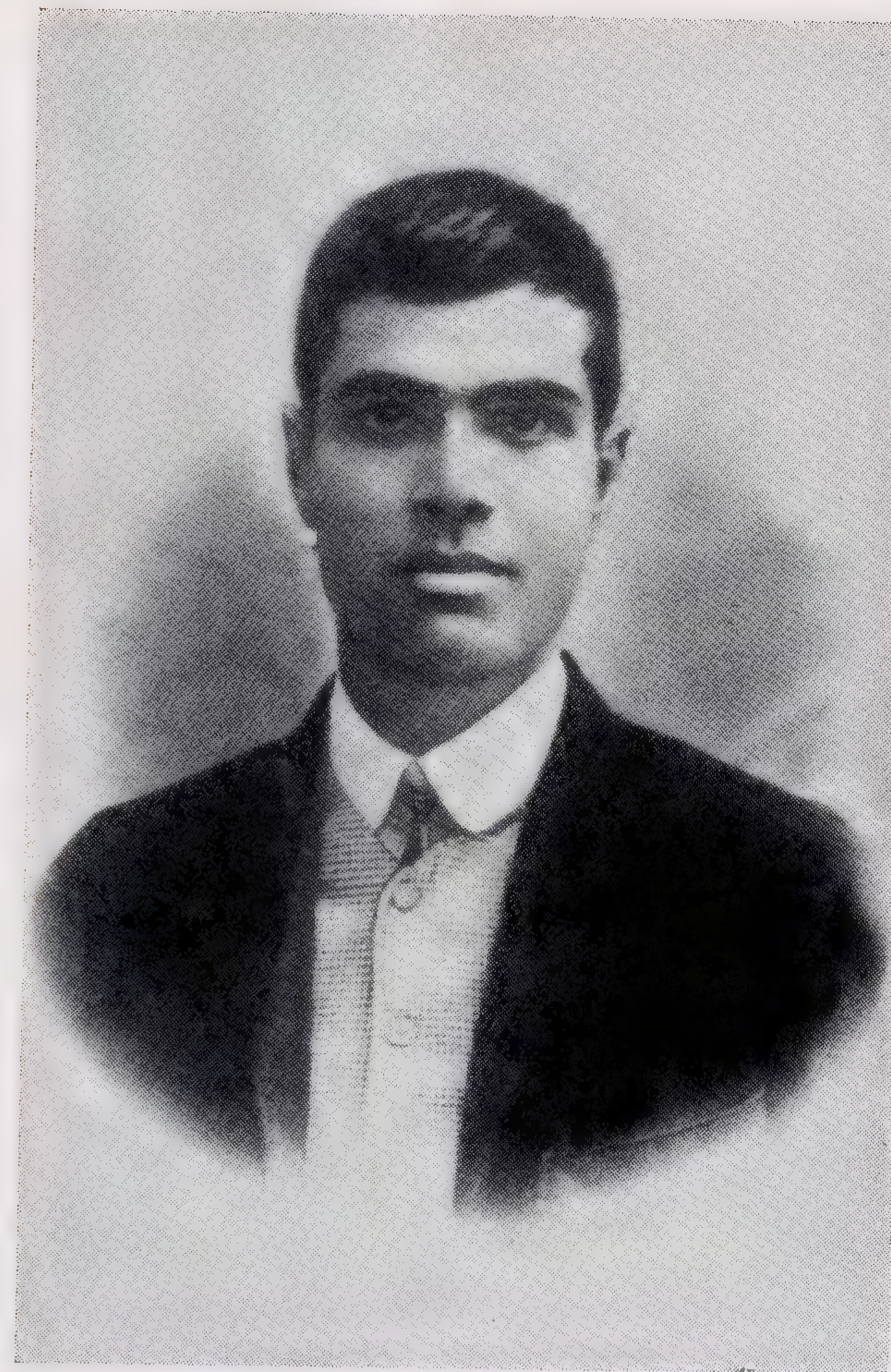
His Life and Work

(*K. Damodaran*)

I

K. Ramakrishna Pillai was born at Neyyattinkara in Travancore, now a part of Kerala State, on May 25, 1878. The importance of Pillai's contribution during the short span of his life—he died in 1916 at the age of 38—cannot be understood without a brief review of the historical, social and economic conditions in which he lived and worked.

The kingdom of Travancore, lying in the southernmost part of India, had already fallen under the suzerainty of the British Government as early as the beginning of the nineteenth century after the historic battle of Kilikollur in which the people's army, led by the famous freedom-fighter, Velu Thampi Dalava, was finally defeated by the British forces. King Marthandavarma's treaty with the East India Company for the protection of his kingdom from external and internal enemies became a weapon in the hands of the British, who consolidated their own power step by step. The Maharaja of Travancore undertook to serve the British faithfully and to pay an annual sum of Rs. 8 lakhs to the British Government for their benevolent protection of the throne from internal disturbances. The British rulers, on their part, upheld the rule of the Maharaja and permitted him to use a substantial part of the state's wealth for his pomp and luxury and other extravagant expenses of his huge palace. He was allowed to administer the state under the direction of the British Resident and was assisted by a Dewan appointed by him in consultation with the British authorities. Real control, however, was vested in the Imperial Government.



'Swadeshabhimani' Ramakrishna Pillai

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But the workers were not prepared to bow down to these oppressive conditions for ever. They became increasingly aware of their position and conscious of their inherent strength. They began to protest against glaring injustices and to agitate for more wages, reduction of working hours, and better conditions of work. Finally workers resorted to the weapon of strike. True, they had not yet emerged as an independent force with their own independent economic and political demands and their own forms of struggle. They were not yet conscious of the requirements of militant mass organizations with clear perspectives and programmes. Their struggles against the exploiters were often spontaneous, unorganized and primitive. But they were capable of influencing the national movement and the socio-economic thought of India.

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The frustration and disillusion created by the unhelpful attitude of the Government and the intensified exploitation by the employers impelled the workers to fight more resolutely for their demands. In the last decade of the 19th century strikes increased in number, intensity, militancy and duration. The most outstanding and militant strikes in this period were those that took place in the Budge Budge Jute Mill in 1895, in the textile mills in Ahmedabad involving 8000 workers against the decision of the Ahmedabad Mill Owners' Association to substitute a fortnightly wage system for a weekly one, in several mills in Bombay in 1897 against the discontinuance of daily payment of wages, and in Bombay Cotton Mill in 1898 for an increase in wages by 10 per cent. There were many other strikes not only in Ahmedabad and Bombay, but also in Nagpur, Kanpur, Calcutta, Madras, Coimbatore, and other places.

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